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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this bulletin is to inform citizens and policy makers about the nature and scope of crime in rural Ohio, the characteristics of those committing crimes in rural areas, and protective means currently employed by rural residents to protect themselves and their property. Data are derived from the Uniform Crime Reports published by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and two studies conducted by the author for governmental agencies. The nature and scope of crime in rural Ohio is reported as follows: 305% increase in rural crimes between 1965 and 1974; vandalism constitutes 38% of all rural crimes; thievery constitutes the second most frequent crime; less than 50% of rural crimes are reported; laxity of courts, lack of law enforcement, laxity and breakdown of family life are the reasons most often cited for the increase in crime; the reasons given for not reporting crimes include "it is no use", "difficult to enforce", "red tape", etc. The characteristics of Ohio rural offenders are reported as follows: 74% are under 30 years; 16 and 19 year olds are the most often arrested groups; 87% are male; 27% are students; 60% are urban residents; 64% are single; 45% are arrested in a group; 23% are intoxicated; 31% have previous records; and 93% are white. This report indicates that among rural Ohio residents many do not lock their homes, less than 50% lock their autos, and most do not lock their buildings or equipment. (JC)

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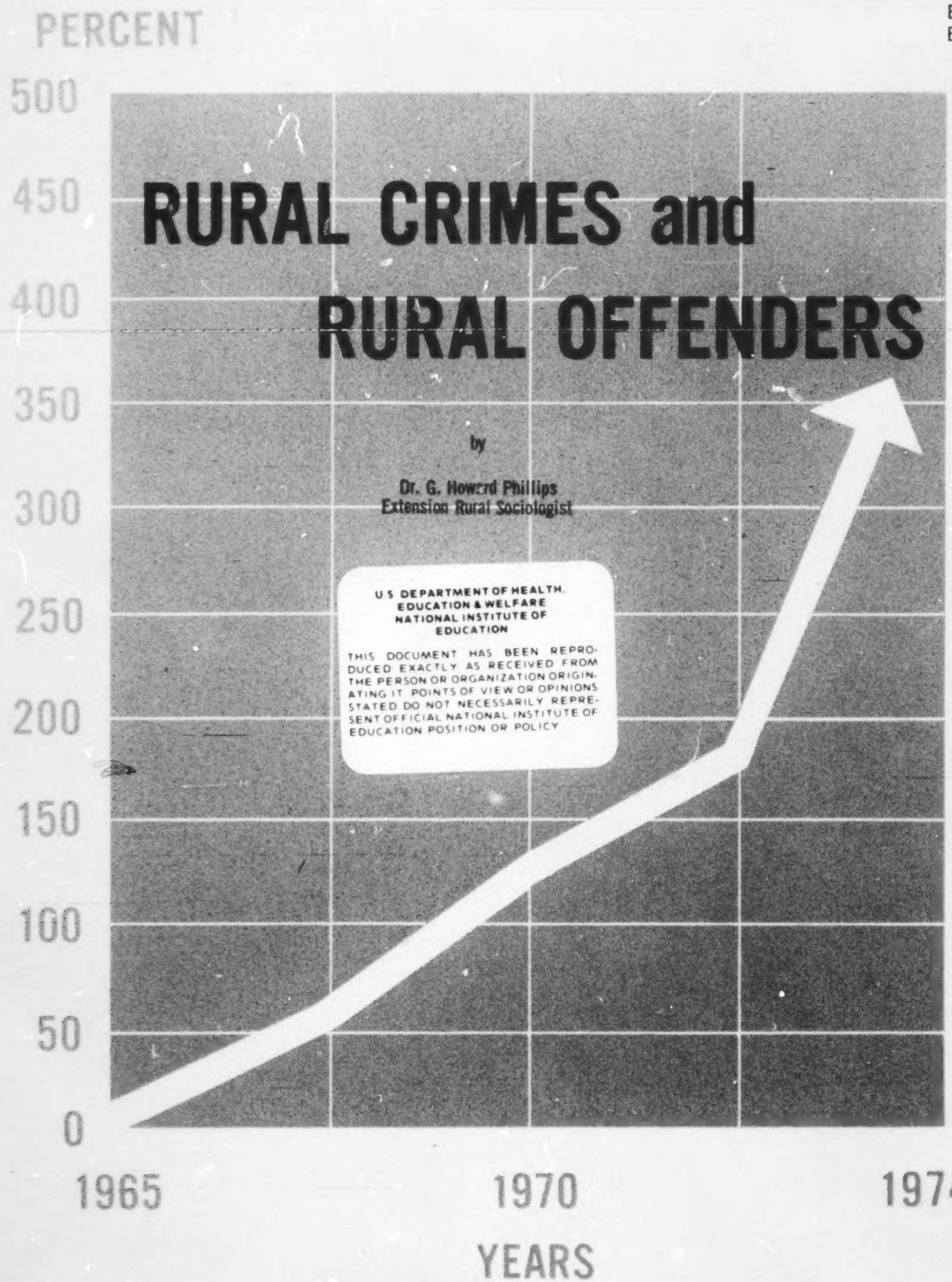

RURAL CRIMES and RURAL OFFENDERS

by

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U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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Summary

The purpose of this bulletin is to inform citizens and policy makers about the nature and scope of crime in rural Ohio, the characteristics of those committing crimes in rural areas, and protective means currently employed by rural residents to protect themselves and their property. Each sub-purpose is summarized below:

Nature and Scope of Crime in Rural Ohio

- 305 percent increase in crimes occurred to rural Ohioans from 1965 through 1974.
- Vandalism is the leading crime in rural Ohio (38 percent of all crimes).
- Thievery is the second most frequent crime in rural areas.
- Less than one half of crimes occurring to rural residents are reported to law enforcement authorities.
- Laxity of courts, lack of law enforcement, laxity and breakdown of family life are the reasons most often cited for the increasing number of crimes in rural areas.
- Rural residents who do not report crimes state such reasons as: "it is no use," "difficult to enforce," "red tape," etc.

Characteristics of Offenders

- 74 percent are under 30 years of age
- 16 and 19 year olds are the most often arrested age group
- 87 percent are male
- 27 percent are students
- 60 percent are urban residents
- 64 percent are single
- 45 percent are arrested in a group
- 23 percent are intoxicated
- 31 percent have previous records known to the police
- 93 percent are white

Protective Means Used by Rural Residents

- Many rural Ohioans do not lock the door to their residence when not at home
- Less than half lock their autos
- Most do not lock their buildings or equipment

Implications

With the year by year increase in crimes committed in rural areas, rural Ohioans no longer can enjoy the luxury of not having to worry about vandalism, thievery, or a multitude of other crimes. Not only are these mounting crimes costly but also the peak probably has not yet been reached.

You cannot completely eliminate the potential of being a victim of crime, but you can reduce the probability. For example, to reduce the chance that your house will be burglarized:

- Make your home look occupied
- Lock all outside doors before you leave or go to bed
- Leave lights on when you go out. A radio playing is also a good burglar deterrent. If you're going to be away any length of time, connect some lamps to automatic timers so your lights turn on at dusk and go off at bedtime.
- Keep your garage door closed and locked
- Don't allow daily deliveries to accumulate when you're gone
- Arrange to have your lawn cut in summer and walks shoveled in winter if you're going to be away for an extended period of time

For information on crime prevention, security procedures, and ways to reduce the chances you will be victimized, contact the Extension Safety Specialist, 2120 Fyffe Road, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio 43210, for pamphlets and other publications or check with your local law enforcement officials.

From a community perspective, much thought and effort needs to be given to developing programs to reduce crimes of opportunity. Law enforcement officials and volunteer organizations more and more are organizing neighborhood and community groups to seek solutions to local problems. Check with leaders of local groups to find out if such activities are being conducted in your community. If not, perhaps you would like to help initiate such a group to meet the needs of residents of your community.

The best safeguard to crime is people who will not knowingly or willingly commit crimes. This is a moral problem requiring solutions at the individual, family, and community levels. No prescription suitable to all can be offered. Churches, schools, and families, the traditional carriers of cultural values, need to examine what young people are being taught about deviant behavior and from what sources are they being influenced. Take the initiative in your community to seek longer term solutions to this increasing problem.

Rural Crime and Rural Offenders

"Horse stealing appears to be more prevalent in those sections of the state (Ohio) where horse protective associations are not organized. . . . Paul L. Vogt (1)

As observed by Vogt in the above 1918 quote, crime is not a new phenomenon in rural Ohio. However, what is new about crime in the country is its rapid rate of increase in the last decade. Crimes known to police in rural Ohio increased by 305 percent from 1965 through 1974.

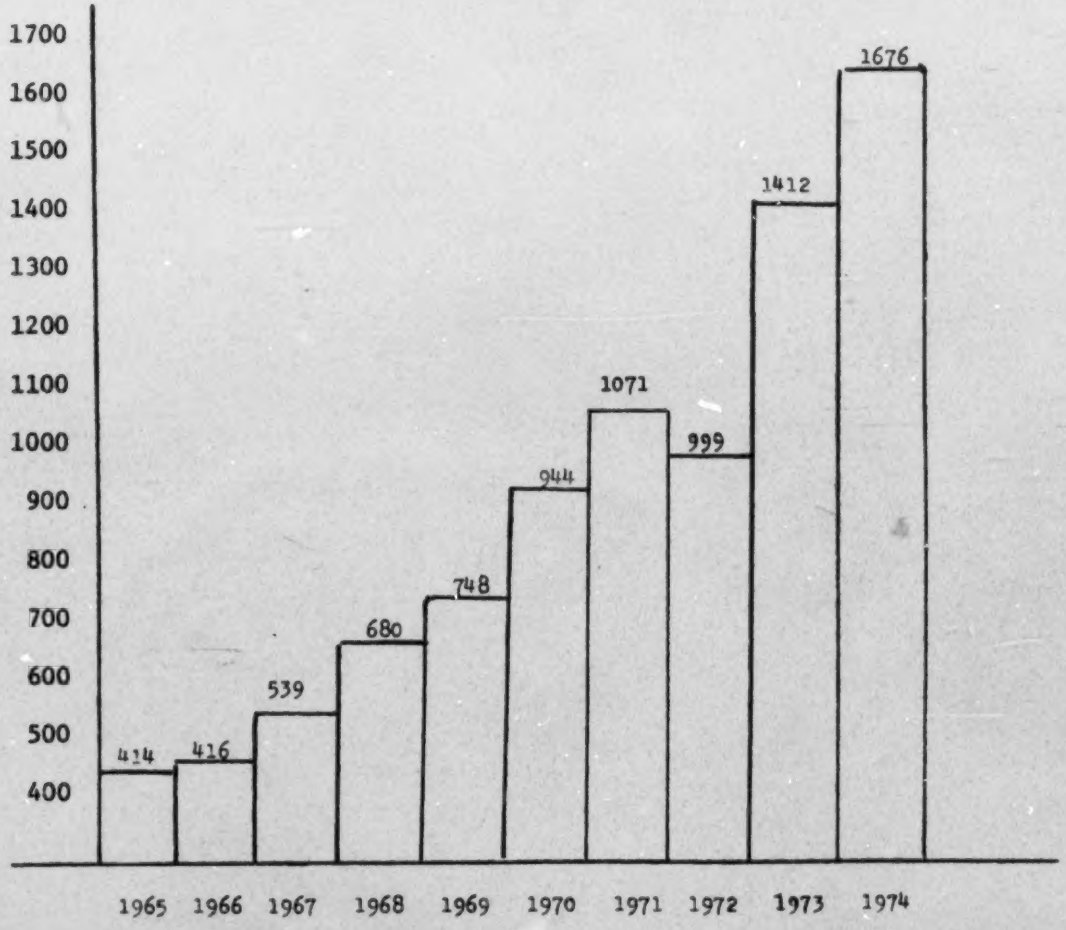


Figure 1: Ohio Rural Crime Index rate* for 1965-1974.

Source: Uniform Crime Reports, 1965-1974.

***The crime rate is based on offenses of murder, forcible rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny-theft, and auto theft per 100,000 inhabitants.**

The purpose of this bulletin is to inform citizens and policy makers about the nature and scope of crime in rural Ohio, the characteristics of those committing crimes in rural areas, and protective means now employed by rural residents to protect themselves and their property.

Data presented in this bulletin are taken from the Uniform Crime Reports published by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and two studies conducted by the author for the Ohio Farm Bureau Federation; Administration of Justice Division, Ohio Department of Economic and Community Development; and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. All publications are cited in the reference section.

Crime is generally defined as a violation of criminal law; not all laws are criminal laws. Rural crime are those crimes committed in places with a population of 2,500 or less. This includes both small towns as well as the open country.

Types of Crimes in Rural Areas

The percent of crimes occurring to rural Ohioans may be observed in Figure 2. Crimes listed here are those offenses reported by victims as occurring to themselves or members of their family. Included also are crimes not reported to law enforcement authorities. Serious crimes such as homicides occur at such low frequency relative to all other crimes that

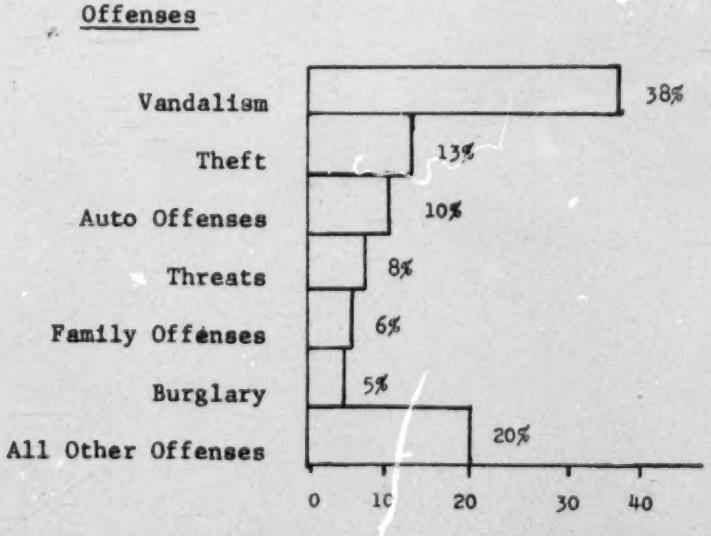


Figure 2: Percent of offenses occurring to rural residents by major categories. (3)

they are reported along with a large variety of miscellaneous crimes in the other category. Vandalism leads the list of rural crimes with theft second. Examples of statements depicting acts of vandalism include: "Unknown person shot hole through mailbox"; "spray paint was sprayed all over mailbox"; and "man drove his truck back and forth through the corn field destroying about one-third of it."

Thefts ranged from burglary to petty theft and included such incidents as: "Broke in house while mother took daughter to school and stole rifle, ring, stereo, and cash; stole radio out of barn"; "gasoline stolen from tank in the yard"; and "stole garden tiller from garden near the house."

As previously noted, the number of crimes occurring to rural people are different from the number of crimes known to law enforcement authorities. The major reason for this discrepancy is because many crimes are not reported to police agencies. The percentage of offenses known to Ohio sheriffs by various crime categories may be seen in Figure 3.

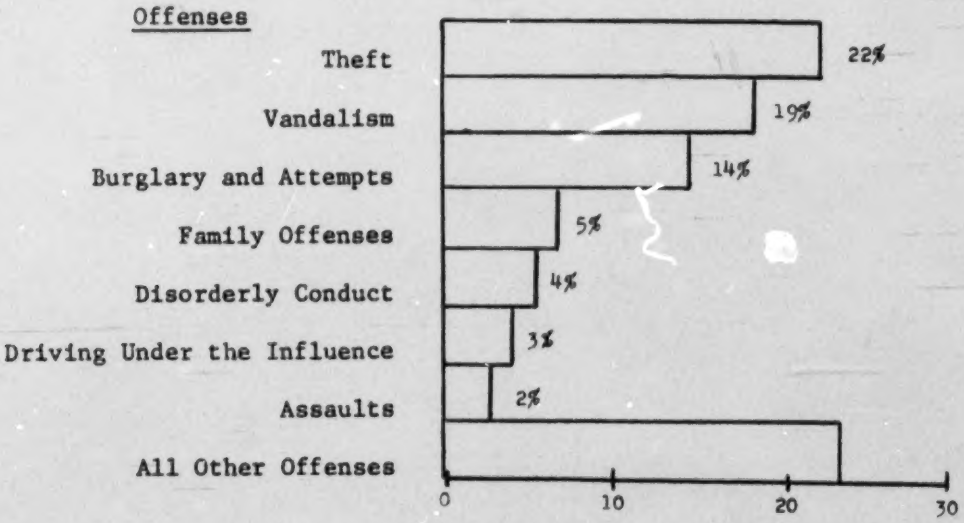


Figure 3: Percent of offenses known to Ohio Sheriffs (3)

Figure 4 reveals the percent of crimes reported to law enforcement authorities. As may be observed in these data, a crime such as burglary is more likely to be reported than crimes that are more personal in nature such as assaults, frauds, or sex offenses. One reason offered for person-related crimes being less frequently reported is that it is often friends, relatives, and neighbors who are the perpetrators. Therefore, a victim is often more reluctant to report the incident as it tends to be more embarrassing to report an aquaintance.

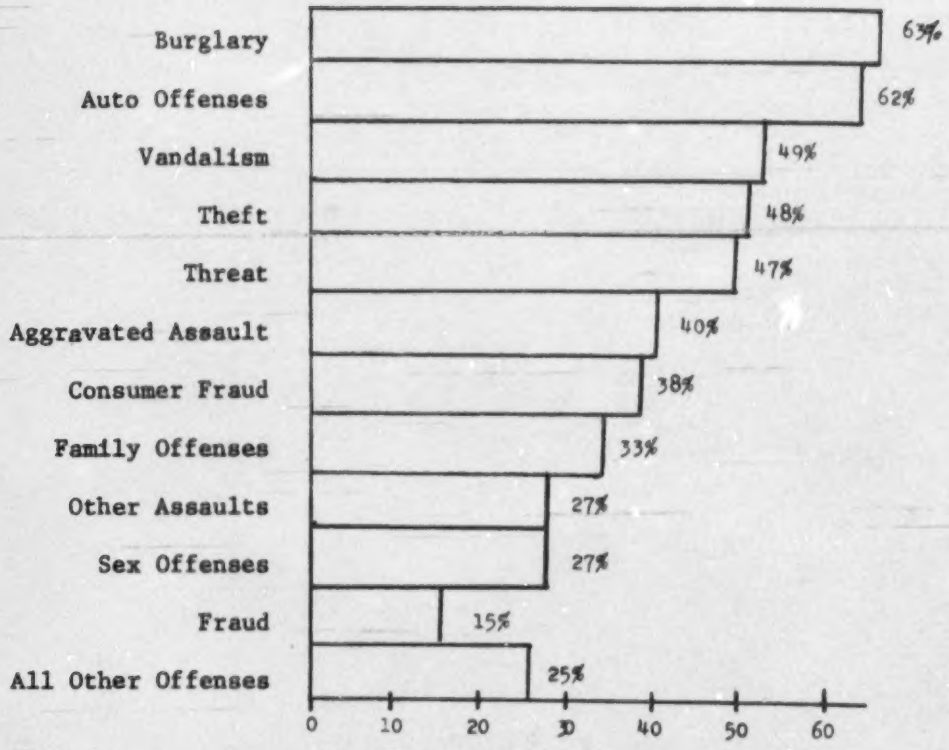


Figure 4: Percent of crimes reported to a law enforcement agency by category. (3)

Vandalism

By any definition, vandalism is the leading crime in rural Ohio. As may be seen in Figure 2, 38 percent of all crimes occurring to rural people or happening in rural areas were committed by vandals. These acts of vandalism most often involved mailboxes but a host of other infractions marred, destroyed or defaced: cars, windows, lawns, shrubs, and a multitude of other kinds of property. These vandalizing acts do not include public property in rural areas such as churches, schools, and business places. Including these would markedly increase the percent of all crimes that are destructive in nature.

Figure 3 reveals that vandalism is second to thefts as an offense known to Ohio sheriffs. It may be seen in Figure 4 that a little less than half the acts of vandalism are reported, according to victims of these offenses.

Thefts

Data in Figure 2 reveals theft to be the second most frequent offense committed against rural Ohioans. If the different types of theft were added together, (i.e. burglary, fraud, robbery, and auto theft), it would approach vandalism in extent. Thefts are by far the leading offense reported to Ohio sheriffs as can be observed in Figure 3. In spite of this, victims report stolen items only 48 percent of the time (See Figure 4).

The type of items taken or destroyed are shown in Figure 5. Automotive related items lead the list accounting for 21 percent. Tools and equipment for both home and business are second in frequency of property stolen or vandalized (16 percent). Damage to residences rank third (10 percent). Recreational items stolen included vehicles, equipment, buildings, and a variety of other items. Other types of property taken or vandalized may be seen in Figure 5. In these data, contrasted to the information in Figure 2, public property is included and is reported in the "all other" category.

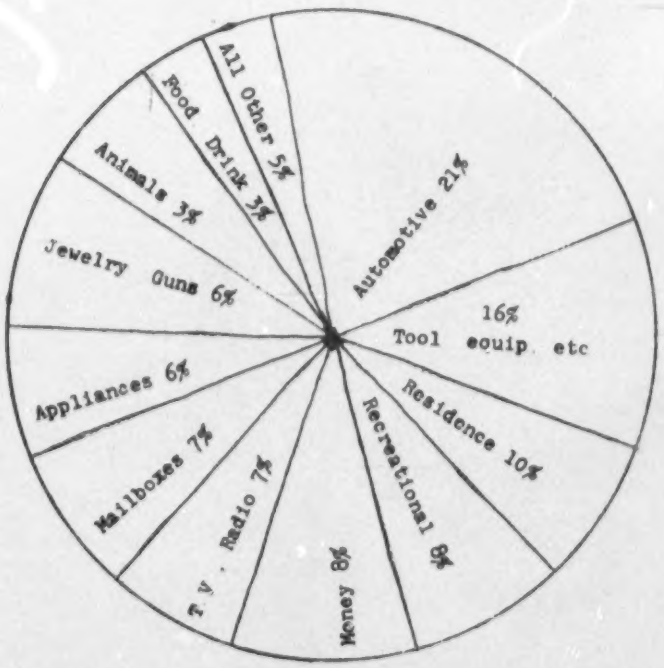


Figure 5: Types of items taken, damaged or destroyed by theft or vandalism (3).

Gasoline is the item most often stolen in rural areas. Twenty percent of all thefts involve this product. Farmers in particular and many rural nonfarm residents maintain gasoline storage units which only 33 percent lock. Two-thirds of rural residents reporting thefts are nonfarm rural residents. Fifty-three percent of the thefts occur at their homes while 12 percent occur at school. The remaining thefts occur in a variety of places, such as parking lots, places of work, or shopping areas.

It is obvious that the rising rate of different forms of thievery and vandalism suggests an increasing disregard for the right of other people to own or control property unmolested. It also suggests less social stigma is attached to these deviant acts.

Selected Perceptions of Rural Residents on Crime

Rural residents offered a variety of reasons for thinking crimes are increasing in rural areas. Figure 6 notes laxity of courts and a lack of adequate law enforcement as the leading reasons for the continuing increase in crime (20 percent).

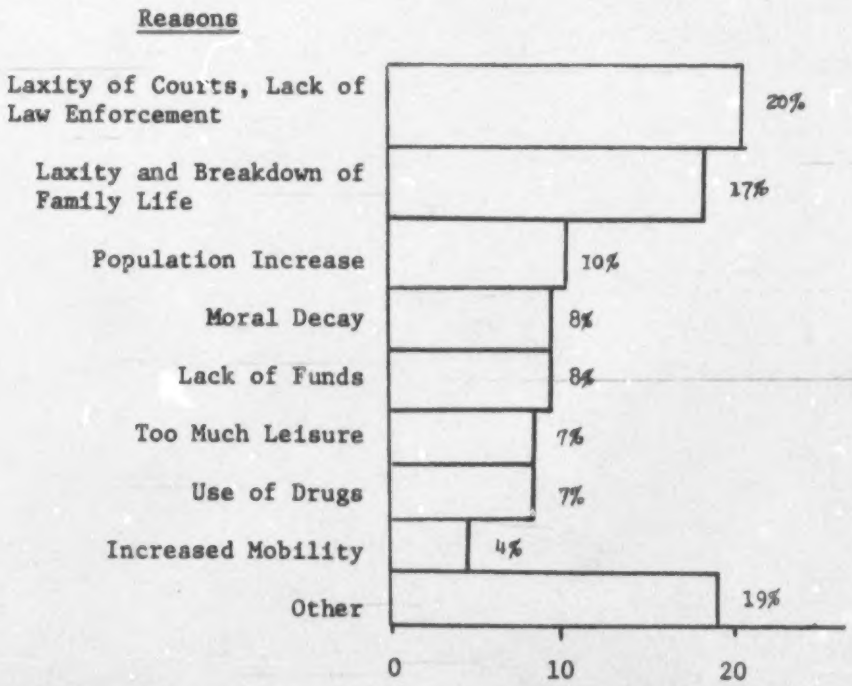


Figure 6: Reasons rural residents gave to account for the increase in rural crime.

Laxity and breakdown of family life was the second most often mentioned cause (17 percent) while population increase (10 percent) accounted for the third most often stated reason. Moral decay, lack of funds, too much leisure, use of drugs, increased mobility and a diversity of other reasons are noted in the descending order of times mentioned.

The increasing crime rate appears to be multi-casual, since most respondents perceived more than one cause at the root of the problem. This suggests a multi-faceted corrective action will be required to start a noticeable reduction in the growing rate of rural crime.

As may be observed in Figure 4, only the offenses of burglary and auto offenses were reported more than 50 percent of the time to law enforcement agencies. Overall, only 45 percent of total crimes were reported. Heading the list of reasons given as to why crimes were not reported was the statement "it is no use." Forty-three percent suggested this response and commented to support their observations with such phrases as: "difficult to enforce, slow follow-up, too much leniency in the courts, red tape, lack of legal evidence, and it would do no good."

Unreported crime more than doubles the scope of the problem. It should be noted however, that the crimes not reported tend to be less serious than most of those reported. People often do not report crimes when they cannot see any value to be gained. However, most law enforcement personnel feel this is short sighted, since they are unable to help on matters they do not know about. They generally encourage all citizens to inform appropriate authorities about all known violations of the criminal code.

Rural Offenders

The characteristics of rural offenders outlined here represent those apprehended by Ohio sheriffs. It is possible that those apprehended may not be representative of all persons who commit crimes in rural areas. However, there is no evidence to suggest the group is not representative.

Age

Figure 7 compares a profile of rural offenders apprehended to a profile of Ohio's total rural population.

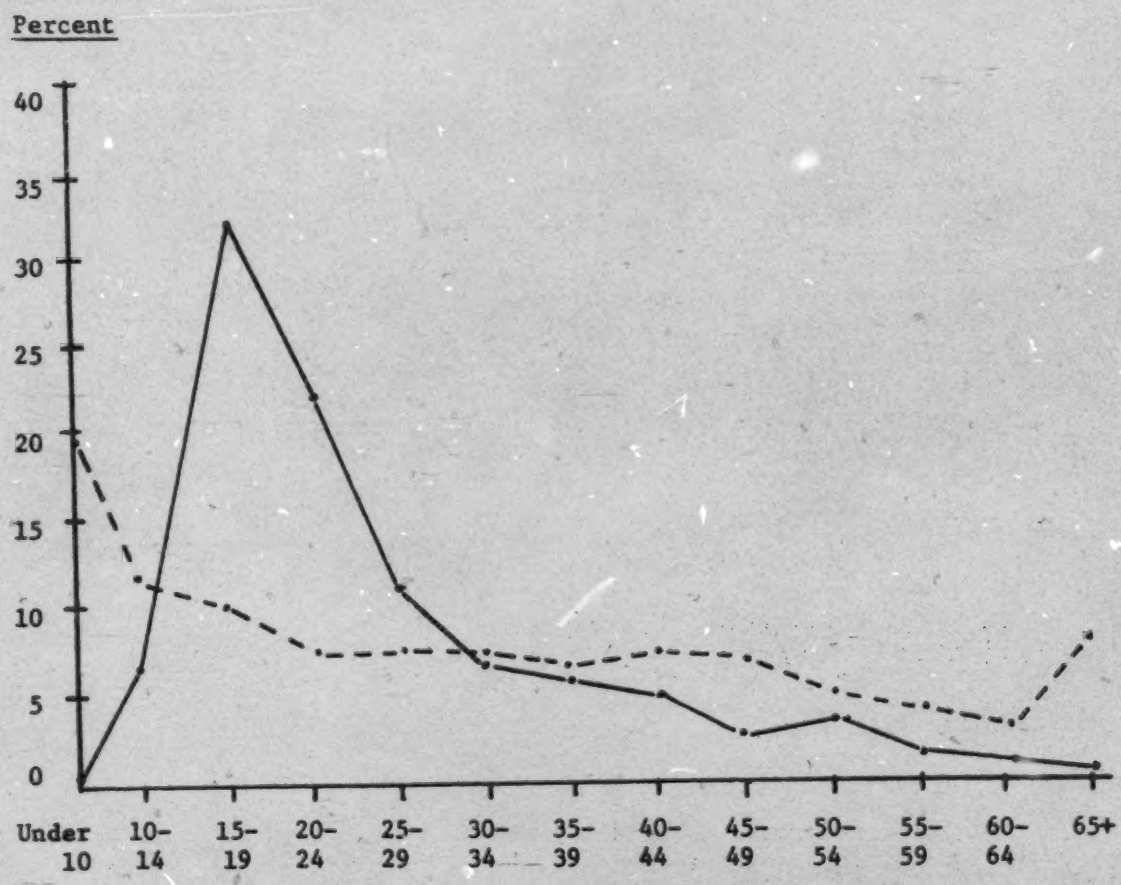


Figure 7: Percent of offenders apprehended by Ohio sheriffs in rural areas compared to the rural population by age categories (2) (4)

Crimes in rural areas are disproportionately committed by young people. An analysis of data reveals 74 percent of those apprehended in rural areas are under 30 years of age. In the total rural population, only 53 percent are under 30 years of age. A further breakdown of these data reveals that teenagers have the highest percentage of arrests. Figure 8 depicts the percent of rural Ohio teenagers who have been arrested with rural teenagers in the United States who have been arrested.

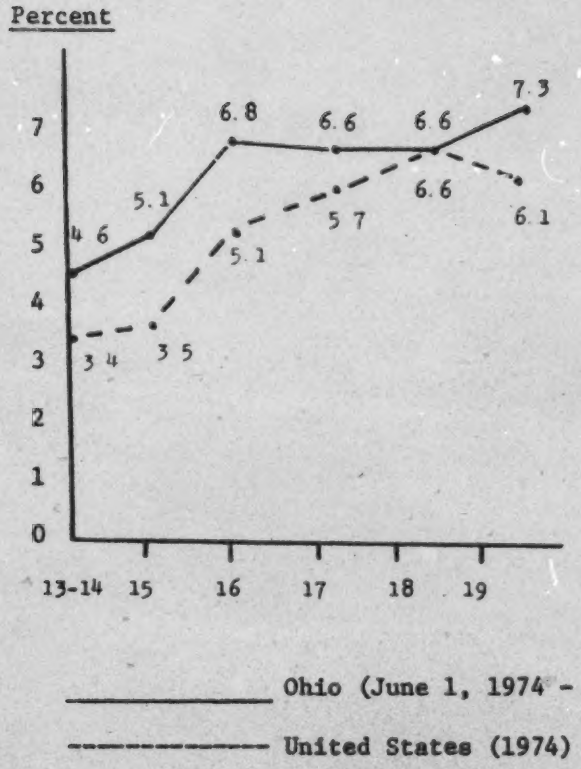
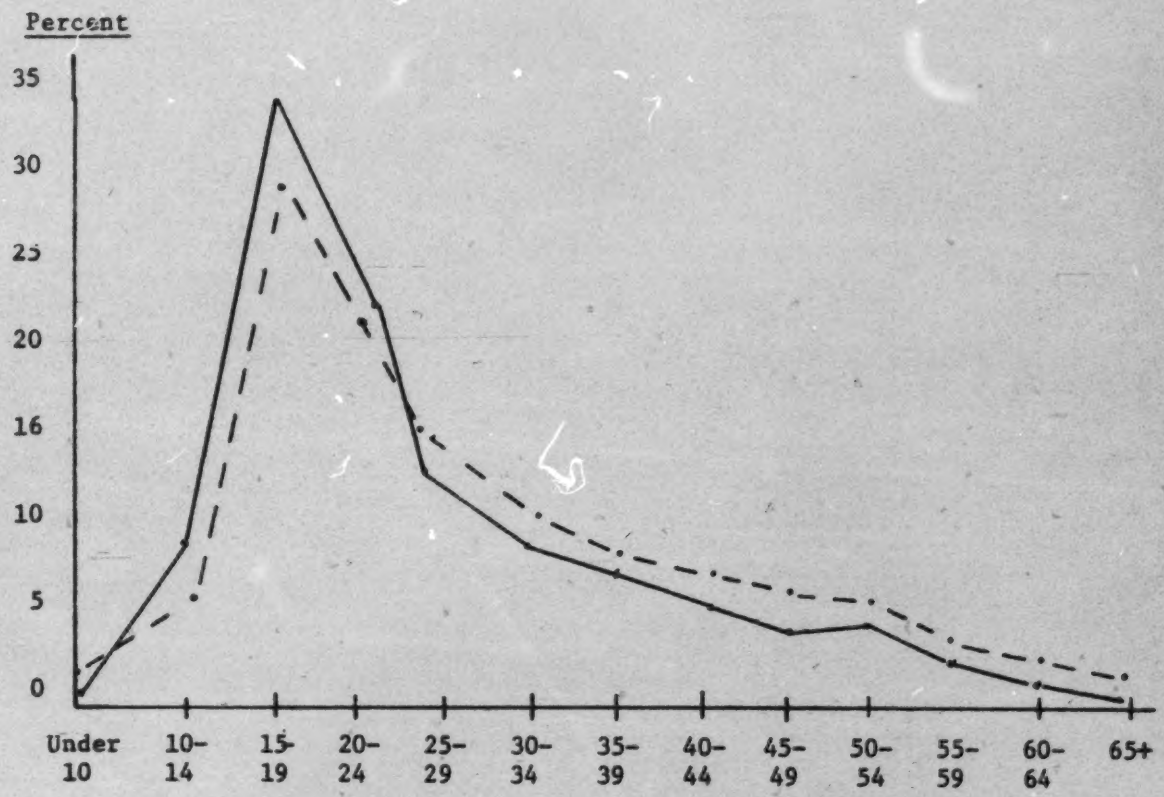


Figure 8: Percent Teenagers Apprehended in Rural Areas of Ohio and the United States by Age. (5)

Teenagers from 15-19 years of age represent only 9.8 percent of the total Ohio rural population but account for one third of all persons apprehended in rural areas. This tends to be higher for this age group in Ohio than for the 15-19 year olds in the rural portions of the nation as a whole (27 percent). A comparison of all age groups for rural Ohio and rural United States may be seen in Figure 9. As previously noted, Ohio tends to have slightly higher percent of teenage apprehensions than in the U.S. but fewer middle-aged apprehensions.



_____ Ohio Offenders apprehended (June 1, 1974 - May 31, 1975)

– – – – – U.S. Offenders apprehended (Uniform Crime Reports - 1974, Table 51)

Figure 9: Percent of Offenders Apprehended in Ohio and the United States by Age Category. (3) (5)

Male and Female

Rural crimes are overwhelmingly committed by males. Eighty-seven percent of those apprehended in rural Ohio were male. This compares very closely with the national average of 88.6 percent for rural males arrested. (5) Females have much less inclination to commit crimes than males. Males, especially, are more likely to commit violent crimes. Edward C. Banfield suggests this is because women in general are better able to control their impulses, more inclined to avoid risk, and less likely to inflict physical injuries upon other persons. Further, according

to Banfield, they also may have less motive and opportunity since they tend less frequently to be family providers. Individuals performing the provider role are often motivated to steal because of the pressures exerted upon them to meet the family's needs. Opportunities are more likely to be encountered by a male provider working away from home than a female carrying out her role in the confines of their home. (6) As more and more women work outside of the home, this too may change.

Occupation of Offenders

The employment status of persons arrested in rural areas is most often classified as "student" (27 percent). This is not surprising inasmuch as a disproportionate number of the offenders are teenagers. About one in six is unemployed. Less than two percent are farmers or farmhands. Offenders tend to occupy a wide variety of jobs but in general they tend to be in the unskilled and semi-skilled categories.

Residential Location of Offenders

A majority of persons arrested in rural areas are non-residents of the community where the crime was committed. Sixty percent are from incorporated places of 2,500 or more population. This large percent suggests that increased mobility of urban residents may in part explain the growing crime rate in rural areas. More people owning cars and better roads through rural areas make the countryside more accessible to the non-rural residents for criminal purposes as well as other more desirable ends.

Seventy percent of offenders arrested are residents of the county in which they are apprehended. Another 18 percent are from counties adjacent to the county in which they were caught. Only 12 percent come from more distant locations than the immediate or adjacent county in which they were seized.

Other Characteristics of Offenders

Crimes are committed more often by single persons than married individuals. Nearly two-thirds are single while four percent are divorced and 32 percent are married.

Persons arrested in rural areas are more likely to be with a group than alone. Nearly one-half were in a group when arrested while 39 percent were alone when apprehended.

Twenty-three percent of persons arrested for crimes in rural areas were intoxicated at the time of their apprehension while 31 percent had previous records known to the arresting officers. Ninety-three percent are white.

Precautions Taken To Prevent Crimes

A long standing tradition in rural areas has been the notion that people did not have to lock their houses or other possessions to make them secure from thievery or molestation. This tradition was in a sense a social indicator of the rights of people to own and control property unmolested. This tradition has changed, as might be noted in Table 1. Sixty percent of rural Ohioans always lock the doors to their residences when leaving. Forty percent seldom or never lock their doors when leaving. This suggests that some residual of the "no-door-locking" tradition still prevails. Data in Table 1 also reveals more rural people lock their doors at night than when they leave the premises.

Table 1

Attitudes of Rural Ohioans Living Outside of Incorporated Places Concerning Locking Their House, 1974.

Response	Doors Are Locked:	
	When Leaving Percent	At Night Percent
Always	60	81
Sometimes	23	8
Hardly Ever	10	5
Never	7	6
TOTAL	100	100

The nature or farming and rural living in general makes locking up a difficult task because of the distance of outbuildings, the frequency of use of equipment and the inconvenience of carrying keys for locking and unlocking purposes. These may be some of the reasons why most rural residents fail to lock most of their possessions. As may be seen in Figure 10, autos and gas tanks are the most often locked items, with farm equipment and barns the least likely to be locked.

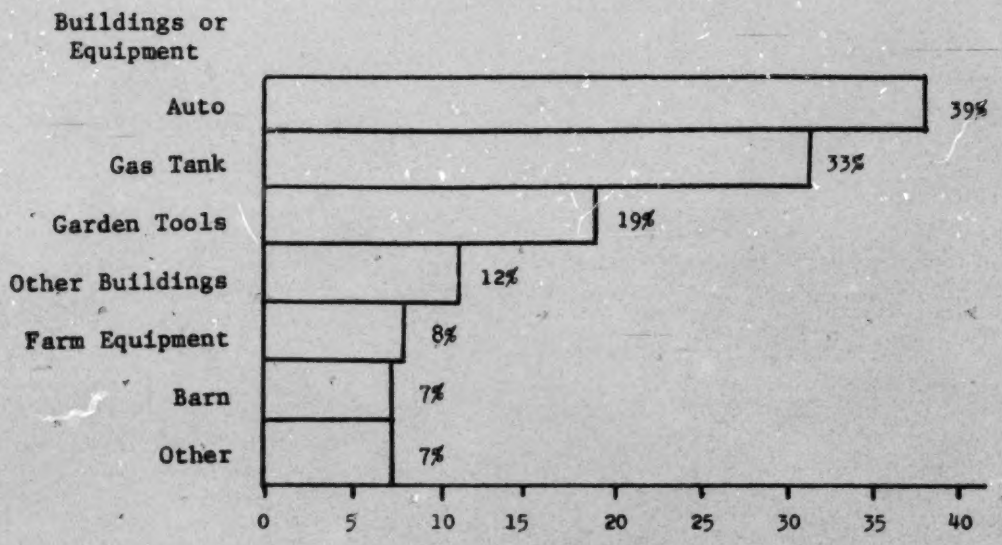


Figure 10: Percent Buildings and Equipment are locked by rural Ohioans. (3)

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